The Obligatory Object Shifting in Mandarin Light Verb Construction

This study examines the obligatory object shifting in the Light Verb Construction (LVC) in Mandarin. The construction is shown in (1).

(1) ta   *(dui)   zhe-jian shi   jinxing   diaocha
    3sg   DUI   this-CL matter   DO   investigation
    "he investigate/does investigation to this matter"

Jinxing 'do' is the LV, followed by a verbal noun (VN) *diaocha* 'investigation', and forms a LVC. The canonical word order in Mandarin is SVO. In the LVC, the object *zhe-jian shi* 'this matter' is obligatorily shifted from its post-verbal position to the preverbal position and is preceded mandatorily by a particle *dui*. This object shifting is not commonly seen in other languages with LVC.
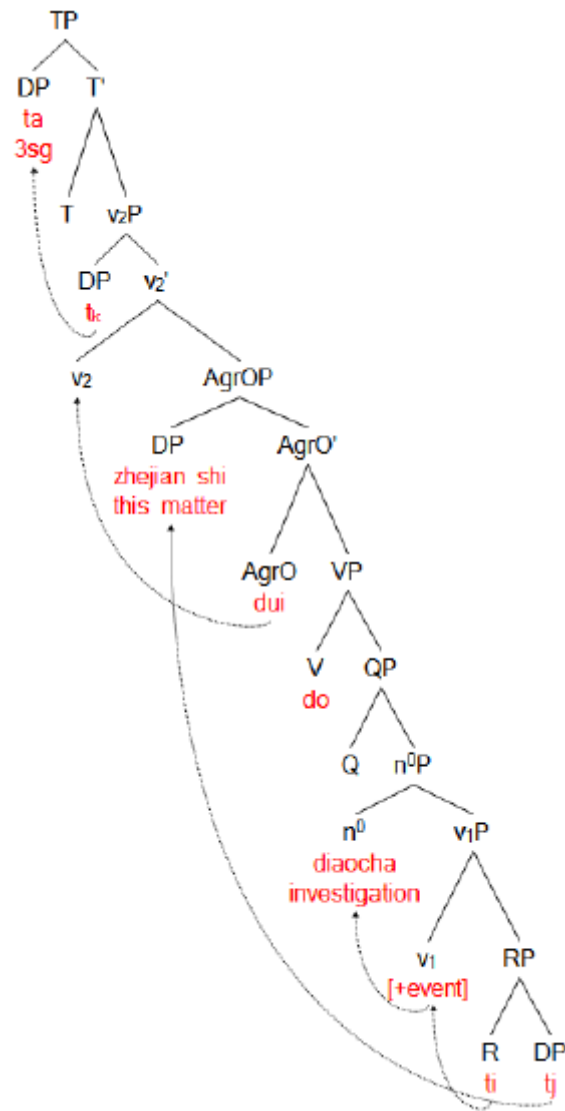
This study mainly answers the two related questions: a. Why is the direct object obligatorily shifted?   b. What role does *dui* play? *(the proposed structure is displayed in the second page)*

I explain the first question in the framework of Distributed Morphology (DM) (Harley 2006). The fact that sentences with LVC can be modified by temporal constituents (e.g. "three days") suggests that the VN is an event noun (Grimshaw 1990). Following DM, I assume an event noun has an internal structure paralleling to that of a VP, and that the VN originates as a neutral root and moves up to a little v (v_1) to obtain its eventive reading. Since the event noun can stand along without the external argument (EA), I propose that a structure outside the VN, but not v_1, introduces the EA. Based on Burzio's Generalization, since v_1 cannot introduce the EA, it cannot assign Case. As a result, the internal argument is not marked by Case in the LVC domain and has to move up.

For the second question, I argue that *dui*, traditionally taken as a preposition, is a semantically-bleached verb. The verbal status of *dui* can be supported by its compatibility with A-not-A structure (a test for verbs) and the fact that *dui* can be selected by Negation, which also reveals its position as below the vP. The ungrammaticality of object fronting without *dui* suggests *dui* is related to Case assignment. I argue it to be the head of AgrO, which is proposed in the literature to be below vP and responsible for assigning the accusative Case (Picallo 1991). Thus, *dui* assigns Case to the fronted object. Since subjects can be introduced without the presence of *dui,* I propose a little verb v_2, which merges with the AgrOP, to introduce the EA. Finally, since *dui* retains its verb properties, it moves up to v_2 to obtain the verbal category.

Many languages with the LVC originate from a SOV order and do not need to move the object. The study is the first step to provide a systematical explanation for the observation that both SVO and SOV languages end with a SOV order in the LVC. However, the claim that the object in fact shifts is based on the assumption that Mandarin is a SVO language, which has always been controversial (Li and Thomspon 1974, among others). Future studies could also examine if LVC could support the hypothesis that Mandarin is SOV.

(words: 500)

TP

DP   T'
ta
3sg

T   v₂P

DP   v₂'
tₖ

v₂   AgrOP

DP   AgrO'
zhejian shi
this matter

AgrO   VP
dui

V   QP
do

Q   n⁰P

n⁰   v₁P
diaocha
investigation

v₁   RP
[+event]

R   DP
tᵢ   tⱼ

References

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